

THE
GENERAL NATURE
OF THE
Christian Religion,

Endeavour'd to be
Briefly Stated and Explain'd to
the Capacity of the *Common
People.*

IN A
SERMON

UPON
2 COR. V. 18, 19, 20.

By *HENRY HEAD*, Master of the
Free-School at *Ambrosbury* in *Wiltshire*.

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By HENRY HILL, Minister of the
Free School in Westminster.

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All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the Ministry of Reconciliation;

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the World unto himself, not imputing their Trespases unto them; and hath committed unto us the Word of Reconciliation.

Now then we are Ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

THESE Words bear a very solemn and awakening sound in them, both to the Preachers of the Gospel, and to the Hearers of it. The First of these, the Preachers of the Gospel, duly considering the Weight and Importance of these Words, cannot but be awefully moved and affected thereby. To consider well, that *to them is given the Ministry*, that unto them is

committed the Word of Reconciliation, that therefore they are Ambassadors for Christ, Ministers acting in his stead, and that about an Affair no less Important, than the Reconciling of Men to God, must needs make them extraordinary Careful and Industrious in the faithful Discharge of the high and holy Trust committed unto them. And on the same Account seriously consider'd, the Others, the Hearers of the Gospel, should not, one would think, but receive their Embassy with all Attention and Reverence, and great Readiness to comply with it.

And as these Words do very powerfully excite, both the Preachers and Hearers of the Gospel, to the Discharge and Performance of their respective Duties: So do they (consider'd singly by themselves, without any regard to the Context) most aptly supply and furnish the Former, with proper, adequate and gradual Measures and Grounds, whereby to proceed, and whereon to insist, for the Instruction of the Latter, after a general way, in the whole compass of common Duty incumbent on both; in

what

what is necessary to be known and done by us all, concerning our Reconciliation with God. And that by leading to the Resolution of these Three successive Inquiries.

1. *First*, How we came to need a Redeemer, in order to our Reconciliation with God.

2. *Secondly*, How far, and in what respect, we are already Reconciled to God by our Redeemer.

3. *Thirdly*, What are the Terms and Conditions of our being fully and finally Reconciled to God, through Him.

The Resolution of these Three Inquiries will exhibit a full account of the general Nature of our Religion, the right Understanding of which, is a matter of the first Concernment and Importance to every Christian; and therefore I will endeavour to Resolve each Inquiry, in as short a compass as your Patience may require, and in such a clear and plain manner, as by every ordinary Capacity may be comprehended.

I. Now the *First* Inquiry which I am to resolve is, How we came to need a Redeemer, in order to our Reconciliation with God.

As *All things are of God*, so he constituted *Adam* a prolifick moral Agent, who accordingly as he *preserv'd*, or *lost* his Innocence, was to Propagate a *pure*, or a *corrupted* Nature to his Descendants. This is visible in the Effect and Event: For as *Adam* finn'd, and thereby corrupted his own Nature; so we find, by lamentable Experience, that he has transmitted a corrupt Nature to us his Posterity.

And the Scripture also assures us, that he has done so. *Adam begat a Son in his own likeness, after his Image; and called his name Seth*, says *Moses*, Gen. 5. v. 3. which Words at first view may seem to import no more, but that *Adam* begat a Son like himself in his external Shape and Figure, without any regard to the internal Pollution of his Nature: But this does not reach the strict literal Sense, much less does it come up to the remarkable Circumstances of the Text. First, This Construction

struction does not answer the strict literal Sense of the Words: For, for *Adam* to beget a Son in his own likeness, must in strict Propriety signify, to transmit to him just such a Nature as his own: Now his own was a Polluted one; and therefore if *Adam* did beget a Son like himself, in strictness of speaking, he must propagate a polluted Nature unto him. But, if the outward and visible Similitude of *Adam* in *Seth*, might be thought, in a large and popular way of speaking, to answer the force and compass of this Expression; yet it does by no means come up to the remarkable Circumstances of the Text. *Adam begat a Son in his own Likeness, after his own Image.* Something Extraordinary doubtless was intended to be pointed out by this Repetition: And what can that be, but the hereditary Pollution of human Nature? That as *Adam* himself was created after the Image of God, which 'tis also observable we are reminded of in Vers. 1. of this Chapter: So *Seth* was begotten after the Image of *Adam*, as now depraved and corrupted, chang'd and alter'd, as to the

Moral

Moral part of it, from that in which GOD made him: And there is one thing more to be observ'd, to confirm and strengthen this Explication. *Adam* begat a Son in his own Likeness, after his own Image; *and called his Name Seth.* If we *could* conceive that the *Holy Ghost* should concern himself to observe to us, that *Adam* propagated his visible Similitude, as all other Creatures do, we might rather however expect to find it spoken of his First Son; but *that* we do not: and the Reason no doubt is, because there was more intended in it; even that *Adam's* internal Corruption also is transmitted to his Posterity. And for this Reason this Observation might best be reserv'd 'till that Son should be Born, in whose Family the Race of Mankind was to be preserv'd, (which was *Seth*, from whom, as we see in the following part of this 5th Chapt. of *Gen.* *Noah* lineally descended) that so we might be assur'd, by the express Testimony of GOD himself, that Corruption is deriv'd upon all Mankind from *Adam*, the Spring and Fountain of their Nature.

And

And accordingly the Psalmist most expressly owns and bewails this Hereditary Corruption in himself, in the 51st Psalm, ver. 5. *Behold I was shapen in Iniquity, and in Sin did my Mother conceive me.* Which Words do plainly put this Matter out of all doubt: For if the Psalmist had reason to confess *thus*, who ought not with the profoundest Humility to make the *same* Confession?

Now all Sin being necessarily Odious in the pure Eyes of GOD, we hereby naturally became the Objects of GOD's Hatred and Displeasure: And so the Apostle tells us, *Ephes. 3. 2.* that *we are by Nature the Children of Wrath.* And since we are so, as it is therefore certain, that we cannot prevent it; so it is also evident, that we cannot redress it; nor of our selves recover into GOD's Favour again; but if left to our selves, should be constantly carried by the fatal Biass of our depraved Nature to fresh Provocations, and must inevitably remain the eternal Objects of his Wrath and Vengeance.

And indeed the Condition of Fallen Man, consider'd simply as such, seems

to be much the same with that of the Angels that Fell; who are utterly destitute of all Power to do Good, and seal'd up and condemn'd to Wickedness and Misery. But, whereas the Angels Fell by their Own proper Act, by the perfect and absolute Freedom of their own Wills, *They* perish without hopes of Redemption: But *the Children of Adam*, who were to be made Partakers of their Parents Sin, and that in a Way they could no more help than (they can now explain, or than) they could help their being Born; have therefore a Redeemer graciously provided for them, whose blessed Undertaking by a more abounding Act of Mercy, has reach'd and included their Parents also.

To ask whether, or how, it could have been consistent with the Justice of Divine Providence, to suffer us to Fall under this Condition, if *Christ* had not been to Die to Redeem us out of it, seems at best an Unnecessary Question: For why may we not be content to take things as we find them, to follow God in his Own Ways, and be determin'd only of what He might *justly* do, by what

what He has *actually* done. Since this alone is sufficient to silence all Disputes, and banish every Scruple out of our Minds. As will appear if we proceed to the Resolution of the

2. *Second Inquiry*, namely, How far, and in what respect, we are already Reconciled to God, by *Christ*, our Redeemer.

In the First Verse of my Text the Author of it tells us, that *God hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ*. Which Words consider'd exclusively to the Nature of Religion, and the Body of the Scriptures, might possibly be interpreted of a compleat and perfect Reconciliation procured for us by *Christ*, independently on our Performance of any Conditions required of us. But as the very Nature and Notion of Religion, and the whole Tenour of the Gospel forbids such a Construction; so the very next Verse seems to be inserted on purpose to prevent it: to wit, *That God was in Christ, reconciling the World unto himself*. We were before told, that *God hath reconciled us to him-*

self by Jesus Christ. But the Meaning of that is here declared to be, that He was *reconciling* us to Himself by Him. Was *reconciling*; this Expression implies the Thing not to be already Finished, but that *something* was done towards it; and what that is we are told in the Words that follow, *Not imputing their Trespasses unto them*; which yet will be found sufficient, to clear the Divine Oeconomy (namely, the Way and Manner of God's Dealing with Mankind) of all Imputation of Injustice or Hardship; and therefore does well deserve to have the Nature of it rightly stated and explain'd.

As it has been shewn then under the former Head, that we were Virtually made Sinners by *Adam*; in that by the Order and Appointment of God, as many as should proceed from his Loins (mediately as well as immediately, as has been instanced in the Person of *David*, as well as *Seth*) were to be Born after his Image, and that therefore when he Fell, we all Virtually Fell in him: So as to our own Personal Actions, though we are not able to live up to

to the Demands of GOD's Law, and it
 be impossible for us *perfectly* to Obey
 it; yet are we not in any degree (as to
 Duty I mean) freed, by Christ, from
 Subjection to it. For Christ came not,
 as he tells us himself, *Matt. 5. 17. to*
destroy the Law, but to fulfill it: that
 is, Not to take away the Authority of
 the Law over us, but to advance and
 re-inforce it. We owe perfect exact
 Obedience to every Command of the
 Law still, in point of Duty, and we
 sin whenever we do in the least trans-
 gress any One of them. For indeed,
 How else could we be said to be Par-
 don'd; seeing Pardon necessarily sup-
 poses Sin, as Sin supposes an Obliga-
 tion to Obedience? And in this, I think,
 I speak the Universal Sense of all Chri-
 stians; who with one Mouth acknow-
 ledge it Impossible for Man to live
 without Sin.

Our Reconciliation therefore with
 GOD, as already absolutely procured
 for us by *Christ*, does not consist in his
 intercepting, or stopping the Current
 of Original Pollution, flowing down
 upon us from *Adam*: Nor yet in his
 re-

re-inflating us into a Capacity of performing the whole Law of God, by evacuating, or taking away our Obligation to Obey, *so much* of it, as to the present Infirmary of Human Nature is *Impracticable*.

But in what respect then *are* we Reconciled to God through *Christ*? or How are *our Trespasses*, through Him, *not imputed unto us*? Why the Truth of the Case in short is this.

It is indeed a receiv'd leading Maxim in Divinity, that *The Law requires Perfect, but the Gospel only Sincere Obedience*. But for the right Understanding of this we must observe, that both the Law and the Gospel, may be consider'd under this Twofold Respect, *As a Rule of Life, or As a Covenant of Salvation*. The Gospel, consider'd as a *Rule of Life*, is full as strict as the Law: But whereas the Law requires perfect unfinning Obedience, as a *Covenant of Salvation*, as well as a *Rule of Life*; the Gospel, though it does indeed require perfect Obedience, as a *Rule of Life*, yet it does not insist upon it, as a *Covenant of Salvation*, but *as such* has

per was admitted an exchange of *perfect* for
by *Sincere* Obedience.

And here it is that the Abatements
of the Gospel begin; and in this, as to
what concerns Obedience, does the di-
stinguishing Nature of it lay.

As we are by Nature Born in Sin,
and the Children of Wrath, and con-
sequently, *as such*, or *according to the*
Old Man, prone to an eternal Course
of Personal Transgressions *through A-*
dam: So we are *therefore by Christ*
made the Children of Grace; so far,
and in such respect, Reconciled to GOD
again, through His Sufferings and Sa-
tisfaction for us, as to be re-establish'd
into a *New* and second Covenant with
Him, suitable to the Frailty and Weak-
ness of our Fallen and Corrupted Na-
ture; having *New* Supplies and As-
sistances of *Grace* afforded us, sufficient
to enable us to perform what (as the
Condition of Salvation, though not as
strict Duty) is required of us.

Thus hath GOD, through *Christ*,
not imputed our *Trespases* unto us: But
as by *Adam's* Sin we are Unavoidably
wounded, so by *Christ's* Stripes we are
Freely

Freely healed. Our Happiness or Misery is again Depending on our Own Choice: And therefore instead of daring to censure the Providence of God for suffering us to be Unavoidably subject to Sin, let us with humble Awe behold the Great Mystery of Godliness which Angels themselves desire to look into; and with Hearts full of Gratitude, bless God for his stupendous Goodness and Love towards us, in providing such a Remedy for us; and with continual Watchfulness and Diligence exert our Endeavours to make that Remedy effectual to us. Which leads to the Resolution of our

3. *Third Inquiry, viz.* What are the Terms and Conditions of our being fully and finally Reconciled to God through *Christ*, our Redeemer. *We pray you, be ye Reconciled to God.*

It has been already occasionally explain'd, How *sincere* Obedience, under the Second Covenant, comes in the room of *perfect* under the First. And here, seeing this Sincerity of Obedience passes, after a general way of speak-

ing

ing, for the Condition of our Salvation *now*, as Perfect Obedience was under the *First Covenant*: To set this matter in a just and clear Light, it is requisite to remark farther, That in this *Sincerity* of Obedience, to make it the full and adequate Condition of our Salvation, there are these Two things to be suppos'd to be included, *Faith* and *Repentance*; so that *Sincerity of Obedience*, besides its own proper and strict signification, must be conceiv'd to comprehend also Sincere Obedience to the Gospel; both in *believing* its great Doctrine of Justification, or Salvation, only for the sake, and through the Merits of *Christ*; and likewise in *repenting*, or Recovering again into a state of proper Sincerity whenever we have fallen short of it; for Both these things the Gospel doth also *command*. And upon *this* account it is, that *Sincerity* of Obedience may, in a large sense, be said to be the Condition of Salvation under the Gospel.

But to discourse more explicitly and distinctly, I conceive the Terms and Conditions of our Salvation, of our

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full

full and final Reconciliation with GOD, may be most fitly express'd, as in these Words, so in this Order.

Faith, Sincerity of Obedience, and Repentance.

The First Condition of our full and final Reconciliation with GOD is *Faith*. By which is meant, as was just hinted, a Belief in *Christ*, or an entire Trust in his Merits: I say, in His Merits. For as under the Law, if Man had maintain'd his Innocence, he had merited Happiness by his own good Works. So now that we have lost our Innocence, and *Perfect Obedience* is still requir'd as a *Duty*, though not as a *Condition of Salvation*, we can only be justified by the Merits of *Christ* imputed to us. And accordingly he is said, in the 13th Chapt. of the *Revelation* at the 8th Verse, to be *the Lamb slain from the Foundation of the World*. And St. *Peter* tells us expressly, in the 4th Chapt. of the *Acts of the Apostles*, at the 12th Verse, that *there is no Salvation in any other: for there is none other Name under Heaven given among*

Men

Men whereby we must be saved. Upon which account it must needs be One, and that the First Condition of our Salvation, to disclaim all Pretension to Merit in our Selves, and to depend and rely only on the Merits of *Christ*.

Another and the next Condition of our full and final Reconciliation with GOD, is *Sincerity of Obedience*. That Sincerity of Obedience is required, in order to our full and final Reconciliation with GOD, appears from the whole Tenour and Current of the Gospel. But seeing I design all convenient Brevity, I will only produce two or three Passages. In the Fifth Chapter of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, at the Ninth Verse, we are told, that *Christ is become the Author of eternal Salvation to all them that Obey him*. And in the Twelfth Chapter of the same Epistle, at the Fourteenth Verse, it is expressly declared, that *without Holiness no man shall see the Lord*. And our Blessed Saviour requires us to keep the Commandments of GOD, as a Condition of our entring into the Kingdom of

Heaven, *If thou wilt enter into Life, keep the Commandments*, Matt. 19. 17.

These are plain Texts, of which it must be said at once, That as they do expressly require us, in order to our future Salvation and Happiness, to lead a holy Life, to obey God, and keep his Commandments: So since we cannot do this to Exactness and *Perfection*, nothing else can be suppos'd to be meant thereby, consider'd as a Condition of Salvation, but that we do it *Sincerely*, in the best Manner we can, and to the utmost of our Power. But this the very best Men do sometimes fall short of; and therefore (such is the Goodness of God towards us) we have leave to rise again, and recover by Repentance.

Which is the Third and remaining Condition of our Pardon and Salvation, and is so frequently taught and inculcated in the Gospel, that I shall only, for Form's sake, give you one Instance; and that shall be out of the Third Chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles*, at the Nineteenth Verse, *Repent, and be converted, that your Sins may be blotted out.*

These

These are the Terms and Conditions
 of our being fully and finally Reconciled
 to GOD through *Christ*: Without our
 diligent and due Performance of which,
 we shall be so far from being the better
 for all that *Christ* hath Suffer'd and Pro-
 cur'd for us, that our Condemnation
 will be so much the heavier, for neg-
 lecting to make the *required* Use and
 improvement of it.

Upon which most moving Considera-
 tion, Let us in the First-Place, with
 all Readiness and Resignation of Mind,
 receive the fundamental Point in the
 Oeconomy of the Christian Religion;
 that is, Let us firmly and heartily be-
 lieve and acknowledge, that there nei-
 ther is, nor can be any such thing as
 proper Merit in our selves, but that we
 are to Hope All from the Sufferings
 and Satisfaction of *Christ* for us.

And then, as to the Second Condi-
 tion of our Salvation, Let us earnestly
 endeavour all we can, to lead a constant,
 steady, and uniform Life of Piety and
 Virtue.

And as often as we fail therein, Let us
 in the Third and Last Place, immedi-
 ately

ately recover by Repentance. For 't
 the last Extremity of Danger, to e
 courage our selves in Sin in hopes
 Repentance. The infinite Goodne
 and Mercy of GOD in accepting R
 pentance, was never intended to give
 Loose to Wickedness, but to preserv
 and secure our Endeavours after Hol
 ness. For what through the subtle D
 ceitfulness of the Flesh, and exasper
 ting Provocations of Men, and the in
 perceptible Stratagems of the Devil f
 condning Both, it is morally impossib
 always to maintain a due and decen
 Command of our Appetites and Pass
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 Possibility of recovering by Repen
 ance, we should thereby be driven t
 Carelessness and Despair. But now
 that Pardon is indulg'd to Penitent O
 fenders, we are hereby excited to th
 speedy making of our Peace with GO
 again, and to the diligent working ou
 of our Salvation with Fear and Trem
 bling. And let us then, whenever we
 apprehend our selves, in any case, to
 have transgress'd our Duty, presently
 enter on a suitable Repentance for it

Let us carefully search and examine, what it was that betray'd us into those Sins and Failings that we have been guilty of; and industriously prepare and arm our selves against it for the time to come. And having thus timely recover'd our selves out of the Snare of the Devil, let us for the future strive what we can, to approve our selves the Worthy Servants of G O D. Let us, to conclude, Make it our chief and principal Aim and Business, to Live Well, and to do Good in the World; and with constant and unwearied Diligence prosecute our great and weighty Design; sticking at no Pains, sparing no Labour, to improve our Selves, or benefit Others; still carrying this in our Minds, for our never-failing Support and Encouragement herein, That the Better we are, and the More Good we do, the Greater proportionably will our Reward be.

F I N I S .

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